

Colorado Conservation Backgrounder

August 2006

Number 0602

2006 Rapid Watershed Assessments (RWA)

Rapid watershed assessments are the product of a process that evaluates resource conditions and needs on an 8-digit hydrologic unit basis. Rapid Watershed Assessments will increase the speed and efficiency of generating natural resource information.

**The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) is a voluntary program established to foster conservation partnerships that focus technical and financial resources on conservation priorities in watersheds and airsheds*

For further information about the CCPI and NRCS rapid watershed assessment guidance visit:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ccpi/index.html>

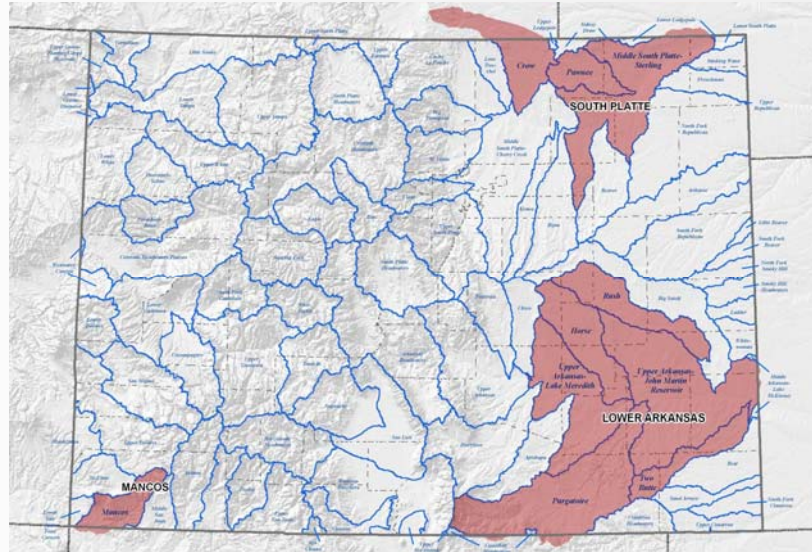


Figure 1. Location map displaying 8-digit Hydrologic Units with RWAs to be conducted beginning in 2006. Source: NRCS

Background

As part of the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative*, the Colorado Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging the development of rapid watershed assessments (RWA) in order to increase the speed and efficiency of generating information to guide conservation implementation. These assessments are conducted by inventorying natural resources within the hydrologic units at the 8-digit level. Primary focus will be on agricultural areas with the objective of broadly identifying current levels of resource management and conservation opportunities.

Rapid watershed assessments provide initial estimates of where conservation investments will best address the concerns of landowners, conservation districts, and other community organizations and stakeholders. The intent of these assessments is to inform decision-makers by giving land-owners and local leaders the information they need to set priorities and determine the best actions to achieve their conservation goals.

Current Efforts

The first RWAs in Colorado will be conducted in the watersheds shown on the map in Figure 1. The Colorado Department of Agriculture's Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) is leading the South Platte RWAs in three watersheds; the Mancos Conservation District Board (MCD) is guiding the RWA in the Mancos Watershed; and Colorado NRCS is conducting RWAs in six watersheds in the Lower Arkansas River Basin.

There are 94 8-digit watersheds all or partially within Colorado's boundaries.

The development of resource profiles and initial assessments in these ten watersheds will be the beginning of an ongoing assessment/planning cycle that is aimed at providing decision-makers with up-to-date natural resource information.

For more information regarding rapid watershed assessments in Colorado, contact Frank Riggle, ASTC-WR., (720) 544-2804, email frank.riggle@co.usda.gov or visit: <http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov>

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Table 1. Initial Rapid Watershed Assessments to be completed by March 2007			
RWA Lead	Watershed Name	Hydrologic Unit Code	Acres
NRCS	Rush	11020012	874,996
	Horse	11020008	909,800
	Upper Arkansas-John Martin Reservoir	11020009	2,456,473
	Upper Arkansas-Lake Meredith	11020005	1,393,559
	Purgatoire	11020010	2,211,808
	Two Butte	11020013	510,652
Colorado State Conservation Board	Crow	10190009	895,670
	Middle South Platte-Sterling	10190012	1,894,424
	Pawnee	10190014	469,870
Mancos Conservation District	Mancos	14080107	515,409

These assessments are conducted by specialists working in each watershed through the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, inventorying agricultural areas, assessing current levels of resource management, identifying conservation recommendations, and making estimates of the impacts of conservation on local resource concerns.

Benefits of these Activities

These assessments will include watershed profile and analysis sufficient to determine resource concerns and conditions. While these rapid assessments provide less detail and analysis than full-scale studies and plans, they do provide the benefits of NRCS locally-led planning in less time and at a reduced cost. The benefits also include:

- Quick and inexpensive means of setting priorities and taking action
- Providing a level of detail that is sufficient for identifying actions that can be taken with no further watershed-level studies or analyses
- Identifying where further detailed analyses or watershed studies are needed
- Plans address multiple objectives and concerns of landowners and communities
- Plans enable landowners and communities to decide on the best mix of NRCS programs to meet their conservation goals